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ABSTRACT

The Career Exploration Program was a 10-week outreach summer program for high-risk youth aged 16 to 21, operated for three years beginning in 1979 by the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America (OIC/A) and funded by the United States Department of Labor. The structured demonstration program focused specifically on high school dropouts, potential dropouts, and juvenile ex-offenders in seven urban demonstration sites across the country. The project attempted to (1) provide the participant group with opportunities to explore vocational and career options; (2) to develop job readiness and job-holding skills; (3) to help the participants clarify their occupational interests and aspirations; (4) to increase the likelihood that youth would remain or return to school or seek meaningful employment; and (5) to reduce recidivism among the youth offenders. The program included classroom instruction, coupled with personal and vocational counseling, on-site work experiences, and follow-up activities and services. The curriculum for the classroom component was adapted from that used in OIC/A's Career Intern Program. Following completion of the 10 weeks, attempts were made to keep youths in contact with the program during the following school year. (KC)

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PROGRAM DESIGN FOR SUMMER YOUTH TRAINING [1]

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Background

The crisis of youth unemployment and the related issues of the school-to-work transition process have been the focus of an intense public policy debate for nearly two decades (Coleman, 1974; Rist, 1980; Taggart, 1976). A constricting economy, the rapid development of a "high tech" society, and a large crop of postwar babies entering the labor force have, in effect, shrunk the job opportunities for young people entering the job market, particularly for those without training and marketable educational experiences. This discouraging picture is particularly disturbing for the economically disadvantaged and minority youth, a group whose school dropout and unemployment rates have reached crisis proportions. In 1977 unemployment rates for sixteen to nineteen year olds stood at nearly 18%; for minority youth those rates were 41%. Four years later, teenage unemployment rates had risen to 19% and the rates for minority youth were close to 46% (U.S. Depart-

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ment of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1981). From the perspective of participation in the labor force, the statistics are even more discouraging. While proportional participation in the labor force for white sixteen to twenty-four year olds has shown somewhat incremental increases during the period between 1955 to 1978, the proportional participation of minority youth during the same time period reflects a clear downward trend. This is particularly the case for black youth (Secretary of Education Hufstedler in testimony before the House Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education, February 25, 1980). Clearly the problems of youth unemployment and the associated issues of "employability" represent serious social and political issues, the proportions and impact of which we are only beginning to understand.

Federal intervention efforts can be traced back over three administrations, beginning with the Kennedy/Johnson administration's War on Poverty and followed by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973. Subsequent amendments to CETA in 1977 established the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act (YEDPA) which funneled over 200 million dollars annually into research and demonstration projects focused on youth unemployment and the school-to-work transition process (Taggart, in Rist, 1981).

One of the major components of the YEDPA implementation was the Youth Employment and Training Programs (YETP) administered by the Office of Youth Programs in the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). YETP provided funding for an array of research and demonstration projects focused on increasing the "employability" of targeted disadvantaged and minority youth. One such project was the Career Exploration Program (CEP), a project begun in 1979 by the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America (OIC/A) and funded through the Office of Youth Programs at DOL.[2] This report describes the goals and objectives of CEP and the components of the programs which served over 4000 high risk youth over the three-year life of CEP.

Program Description

The Career Exploration Program (CEP) was a ten week outreach summer program for disadvantaged youth aged sixteen to twenty-one, operated in seven urban cities across the U.S. The structured demonstration program included classroom instruction, career and occupational exploration activities, vocational and personal counseling and guidance, parttime

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[2] Funding for the 1981 program was provided by OYP/DOL and local CETA prime sponsors. In two cases, OYP/DOL and state agencies provided funding.

work experience in subsidized private-sector work sites, and job placement and follow-up services. The program specifically focused on "high-risk" youth, high school dropouts, potential dropouts, and juvenile ex-offenders identified by the schools and the courts.

CEP was conceptualized and designed by OIC/A with four broad goals in mind: 1) to increase the likelihood that high risk youth would remain in school, return to school, or seek meaningful employment; 2) to place below the participants a "social net" (Rist, 1981,p.17) to facilitate their transition from school to the world of work and adulthood; and 3) to provide participants with experiences and skills to enhance their future "employability" and to reduce recidivism among youth offenders. The specific program objectives included the following:

- To improve participants' career planning abilities to the extent that they can assess their own skills and abilities and formulate a realistic career plan.
- To improve participants' career knowledge base so that over the course of the program, participants gain increased insight into a range of specific careers.
- To improve participants' ability to utilize career related resource materials.
- To enhance participants' academic self-esteem.
- To increase the likelihood participants who have dropped out of school will re-enroll and those in school would remain.

CEP was not designed to provide either summer jobs or specific vocational training, nor was it designed to remediate serious school learning problems. CEP was a "life-line", designed to offer the participant an alternative to "hanging out" in an inner city environment of sparce recreational opportunities, limited jobs for unemployed youth, and an environment which encourages drug usage and crime. For many of the youth in the target population, the summer is a critical time of transition and decision-making. The goals of CEP clearly outline a strategy to help the youth get through the summer, offering them an opportunity to clarify their interests and aspirations as they relate to work or returning to school, to realistically assess their options for getting a job or getting further training, and to learn critical "job holding" skills.

As the prime sponsor, OIC/A and its Division of Special Programs developed a set of implementing guidelines for use by the local project staff. Despite the diversity of the sites in terms of organizational contexts, populations served, and community needs, these guidelines served as a broad framework with which implementation could be monitored. The guidelines covered:

- staff selection and recruitment;
- procedures for establishing linkages with the community, the schools, the courts, and public and private sector organizations;

- curricula design;
- participant recruitment and selection;
- management and organizational structure; and
- procedures for data collection for use in the evaluative activities.

Sites

Demonstration sites were selected by OIC/A from among the OIC/A network of field sites across the country. Criteria for selection included evidence of need (rates of school dropouts and unemployment), community support, facilities and adequate logistical support, existence or potential existence of linkages with employers, the schools and court referral agencies, and evidence of support from the local prime sponsors. The seven selected sites included Atlanta, Grand Rapids, Nashville, Philadelphia, Providence, San Antonio, and Washington, D.C.

Participants

Participants in the CEP project were selected from a pool of applicants referred by local schools and the juvenile justice systems in the communities. School counselors supplied the names of potential dropouts and dropouts who had expressed interest in the program. Adjudicated youth

were recruited by referral through the juvenile courts and justice systems. Program participants were stratified such that non-adjudicated youth were selected in 3:1 proportion to ex-offenders. The participant characteristics remained somewhat stable over the three project years (1979-1981), although there was some variation from site to site. Slightly more than half of the participants ranged in age between seventeen and twenty; about 40% were aged sixteen or less. Males and females were about equally represented in the participant groups. Over 90% of the participants were minority youth; about three-quarters were black, non-hispanics. Twenty percent were high school dropouts; 75% were high school students. Close to three-quarters of the participant group were non-offenders.

At each of the demonstration sites, the CEP project was structured in such a manner as to integrate the three program components. The underlying rationale for this integration was that the project should attempt to bridge or transist the usual gap between the classroom, with its focus on formal learning about jobs, career entry requirements, and occupational choices, and the workplace, which requires a set of attitudes and job holding skills obtained primarily through experience. The program components

included the following:

- direct classroom instruction, coupled with individual and group counseling and guidance;
- career exploration experiences in public service agencies and in the private sector businesses and industry of the local community; and
- post-program follow-up contacts and support services which served to reinforce the positive effects achieved during the summer program.

What follows is a brief description of the objectives and delivery methods of each of the program components.

Classroom Component

This component consisted of two hours of instruction each, five days a week for ten weeks. Academic credit was granted to participants for the classroom component in six of the seven sites. The curriculum for the program was adapted from OIC/A's Career Intern Program (CIP) and included units on self-awareness and goal setting, identifying present career interests, learning about careers, job seeking skills, on-the-job behaviors and decision making. A variety of instructional delivery methods and resources were designed by OIC/A for use by each of the OIC site locations. These included direct instruction, group discussions, independent work exercises, and role playing.

During the two-hour classroom segment, student learning was directly related to career exploration and personal

growth. These activities were focused on building basic employability skills and facilitating the transition into the workplace. Classroom activities included learning to read want ads, completing employment applications, utilizing community resources, preparing for job interviews, and exploring problems and effective work practices and behaviors that have been observed on the job sites.

Personal and vocational counseling was an integral part of the participant's experience in CEP. Frequently the counseling took place during the two-hour classroom component, either individually or in small groups, lead by the counselor/coordinators on the staff. The counseling process focused on developing self-awareness, clarifying career and life goals, and exploring the participant's behavior and attitudes in the context of the work site.

Career Exposure Site Experiences

The two hour classroom component was followed by four hours of on-site work experience. For the most part, CEP participants had not worked before or had limited experience in obtaining and holding a job. This work experience component provided them with a rich opportunity to develop work habits and appropriate on-the-job behaviors such as initiative, regular attendance and punctuality, organization and management of time, interactions with co-workers

and supervisors, and cooperation in task completion--habits and behaviors which might be termed "job holding" skills.

In many cases, the participants were placed in entry-level career positions as closely matched with their interests as was possible. Although the job placement possibilities varied from site to site, depending on the cooperating employers, a typical cross-section of placements would include: file clerk, stock person, store clerk, day-care worker, assistant in a medical or dental office, groundskeeper, and mailclerk.

One important outcome of the career exposure experience was the integration of the curriculum of the classroom component with actual work experience. The learning activities experienced in the classroom and in the counseling sessions could be tried out and practiced in a lab-like work setting. Likewise, the experiences encountered in the work-place became the topics for discussion and exploration in the classroom. A second outcome, perhaps indirectly more important, was the opportunity to observe role models in the workplace and to develop appropriate interpersonal and communication skills with other workers and supervisory personnel.

Follow-up

The final component to the Career Exploration Program was a series of activities in the 240-day period following the ten week summer program. During this period, follow-up coordinators at each site maintained contact with participants through review classes, counseling and job referral services, telephone contacts, home visits, a CEP newsletter, and at several sites, the maintenance of a "resource center", containing job information, college and technical school catalogues, armed services information, GED information, and general assistance with social service and employment services available in the community.

Personal contacts established during the summer program were utilized on a continued basis during the follow-up period. Summer coordinators were typically full time employees of the school system and thus were valuable follow-up contacts as well. These coordinators were encouraged to keep in touch with the participants enrolled in the school, and to make frequent contact with CEP staff. Contact was maintained between the court and CEP staff regarding the status of adjudicated participants. The only subgroup of participants for which there was no "built-in" adult contact for follow-up was the dropout who was not adjudicated. These participants were often the most difficult group with

whom to maintain contact.

The local CEP program staffs developed various strategies to maintain contact with participants and to involve them in a variety of tutoring and counseling programs. Among the strategies used were holding social gatherings at the site, holding job placement sessions and career fairs, inviting prospective employers, and visits by CEP personnel to the schools.

Summary

The Career Exploration Program was a unique ten-week outreach summer program for high risk youth aged sixteen to twenty-one, operated for three years beginning in 1979 by the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America (OIC/A) and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. The structured demonstration program focused specifically on high school dropouts, potential dropouts, and juvenile ex-offenders in seven urban demonstration sites across the U.S. The goals of the project were 1) to provide the participant group with opportunities to explore vocational and career options; 2) to develop job readiness and job holding skills; 3) to help the participants clarify their own occupational interests and aspirations; 4) to increase the liklihood that youth would remain or return to school or seek meaningful employment; and 5) to reduce recidivism among the youth offenders.

The demonstration program as designed by OIC/A included classroom instruction, coupled with personal and vocational counseling, on-site work experiences, and follow-up activities and services. The curriculum for the classroom component was adapted from that used in OIC/A's Career Intern Program. An evaluation of the impact of the Career Exploration Program was conducted by the Center for Studies in Social Policy in cooperation with OIC/A (O'Malley, 1982).

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